



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

The Importance of Face-to-Face Communication in HR Departments

A study in the field of Organizational Communication

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Abstract

The present research project deals with the importance of face-to-face communication in the comprehensive scope of duty of Human Resources Departments. It analyzes different circumstances and conditions that characterize the use of this personal way of communication and explains motives and attitudes of Human Resources Executives in regard to their communication behavior. In addition the discussion points out limitations of the face-to-face communication channel and describes usual consequences in daily work situations. Compared to these aspects HR Managers also communicate by means of several media channels. The project illustrates different situations in connection with the disadvantages of each media channel and eventually demonstrates the interplay of all personal and impersonal communication behavior.

The research question focuses the role of face-to-face communication in the work of Human Resources Managers. The qualitative research study is based on eight guided interviews with HR Personnel in leading positions from different companies and organizations in Göteborg/Sweden. These interviews are evaluated with qualitative methods.

Most important in regard to the data results is the fact that face-to-face communication is highly valued in business interactions today. Although there are many other opportunities and tools being used in increased frequency HR Managers still prefer the personal communication with their employees and clients in specific situations of uncertainty and trust. Remarkably characteristic is the conscious choice of each communication channel made by the HR Managers and its thorough questioning in terms of communication purpose, circumstances of the receiver, the topic's complexity, time aspects and certain features of each channel. Global and regional companies exhaust all possibilities of the technological development but factors such as logistic arrangements, generational matters, company size and individual preferences still determine their communication choice to a high extent.

Keywords: face-to-face communication, Human Resources, mediated communication, communication channel, organizational communication

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List of Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
cf.	confer
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ed	edition
e. g.	exempli gratia
E-mail	Electronic Mail
et al	et alii
etc.	et cetera
f.	and the following one
ff.	following pages
F2f	Face-to-Face
f. e.	for example
fig.	figure
ibid.	ibidem
i. e.	id est
int.	international
MR	Media Richness
p.	page
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant
SMS	Short Message Service

1 Introduction

In today's fast developing society people have numerous opportunities to get in contact and to communicate with each other. Especially the popularity of channels that are based on digital technology has increased tremendously so that many of us cannot imagine living without them anymore. Digital devices such as mobile phones, blackberries and iPads facilitate our lives and connect us wherever we are. Other tools like the intranet, telephone and e-mails have become a self-evident part of any office communication. Many companies have even implemented Social Media tools as wikis and blogs for their employees and are constantly enlarging their Social Networks with purposive strategies and features. In light of all these possible channels one may wonder about the significance of face-to-face communication in people's interaction.

One of the places in a company's structure where personal communication is essential is the Human Resources (HR) Department. HR Managers recruit new employees, conduct interviews, create assessment programs, instruct and supervise their staff members and give feedback on a regular basis. Most of the organizations today have an extended regional and global network with offices and employees all over the world. This distributed work structure makes great demands on the communication behavior and channel choice. HR Executives need to decide for the right way to make the communication as effective and successful as possible for the task at hand. In order to perform all these tasks in their daily work they use many different channels when communicating with their employees. Face-to-face communication is therefore as available as mediated communication, but may have a different importance in comparison.

2 Research Overview

The subject of this study can be assigned to the field of organizational communication. Miller (2009) concentrates on many theories and their development over the years in her work "Organizational Communication". One of these theories that is related to this project is the Human Resources Approach. This approach includes all channels of communication and does not emphasize one specifically. Their usage depends on the intention of the sender and the circumstances of the situation. These channels are the personal or face-to-face communication and the written communication via E-mail or notes/paper (cf. Miller 2009, p. 50/51). Beyond that Miller does not offer any indication when and under what circumstances a face-to-face communication appears and when and why other channels are preferred. This is to be researched deeper by this project.

According to a British survey conducted by the journal *IRS Employment Review* in 2005 many employers value face-to-face communication for certain situations in their companies, especially for keeping the staff informed about organizational changes. But also the encouragement of employee involvement and performance can be best incorporated in team meetings and focus groups. The specialist journal concluded that it is all about the effectiveness of communication and choosing the appropriate channel for the particular situation (cf. *management-issues* 2005, 1A). In this connection it is interesting to find out about the opinion of HR Managers, as a specific group of employers, concerning an effective communication channel for a respective situation in their daily work and under what conditions alternative channels are valuable or not with corresponding consequences.

Another work connected to face-to-face communication is Susan RoAne's "Face to Face: How to reclaim the personal touch in a Digital World" (2008) in which she explains how a person should conduct in face-to-face situations such as interviews, presentations or business lunches and how to make the right use of technology in order to enhance and not dominate our personal and professional life. She further contrasts the channels email, phone and face-to-face with each other and also relates them to the handling of office politics. However one issue still and more than ever remains interesting for a deeper research and that is the importance and use that HR Managers connect with these communication channels in the framework of their employee and client interaction.

In his article "How face-to-face communication helps at work" Sunder Ramachandran illustrates different occasions where a face-to-face communication is vital as this channel provides warmth and emotion that telephones and computers lack of. In appreciating colleagues, giving feedback, supporting conflict resolution and assigning responsibilities the personal contact can make an important difference in the effectiveness of the respective communication (cf. *rediff news* 2006, 1B). Beyond his illustrations the comparison of the different characteristics of communication channels used at a certain work place appears

attractive and necessary to study further. Especially the aspect of a deeper insight in the motives and minds of decision makers based on their personal work experiences can complement the current knowledge in this field.

These works are just some examples that are related to the topic of this research study but already provide an indication for a potential research problem.

2.1 Purpose and Research Question

The project aims to analyze the circumstances and conditions that characterize the use of a face-to-face communication in the comprehensive scope of duty of Human Resources departments. In light of the given background with its versatile possibilities of digital technologies and mediated channels the role of the face-to-face communication is to be explored. This study intends to research the motives and reasons of HR Managers that make them prefer a personal contact in communicating with the department's staff in comparison to other available channels such as the intranet, telephone or E-mail. In connection to this idea possible advantages and disadvantages of a face-to-face communication are discussed in order to eventually explain the meaning of this channel in the work field of HR Managers. Resulting from this the following research question is relevant.

- ✧ *Which role does the face-to-face communication play in the work of Human Resources Managers?*

Related questions are: Under what circumstances/conditions is face-to-face communication the chosen channel in HR Departments? Which motives evoke a face-to-face communication and what are the consequences in the given situation? What advantages and disadvantages see HR Managers in this personal channel?

3 Definitions

3.1 Communication

The most elementary term to clarify in this study is *Communication*. By the following type Allwood defines communication in a way that may cover any of its uses. Communication thus is the transmission of content X from a sender Y to a recipient Z using an expression W and a medium Q in an environment E with a purpose/function F. (Allwood 1983). A rather new explanation is taken from 2008 where communication is defined as “the sharing of anything between two or more arbitrary entities”. This is more adequate to the research topic as it emphasizes the “sharing” unlike the “transfer” aspect and highlights the active participation of both the sender and the receiver. They engage in a process of co-construction and co-activation of meaning (Allwood 2008).

3.2 Face-to-Face Communication

Especially interesting in the framework of this research is one way of interaction, the *face-to-face communication*. The face-to-face communication is the personal mode of communication in which the participants can directly respond to signals of the counterpart (mimic and gesture). Such back couplings (feedback) between the communication partners in terms of queries and alternating conversation lead to immediate comprehension opportunities with a high flexibility. The immediate comprehension in the Face-to-Face communication enables a higher influence in comparison to mass communication. (van Koten 2011, marketicon 1C). Berko et al. (2007) define face-to-face communication as a form of interpersonal communication (being part of human communication) that takes place between two or more persons who establish a communicative relationship. A rather technical explanation is given by Tubbs and Moss (2003): „[...] face-to-face communication is a multichannel experience. Simultaneously, we receive and make use of information from a number of different channels. The channels of face-to-face communication are the sensory organs.”

Face-to-face communication in this study is to be understood in the context of (1) interpersonal and (2) organizational communication.

Interpersonal Communication is the basic unit of communication. It may occur among three or more individuals depending on the circumstances, such as in group meetings, as well as between two people. (cf. Tubbs, Moss 2003). *Organizational Communication* from a systems perspective is defined as “the process of creating and exchanging messages within a network of interdependent relationships to cope with environmental uncertainty.” (Goldhaber 1990). Wilson, Goodall and Waagen define *Organizational Communication* as “an evolutionary, culturally dependent process of sharing information and creating relationships in environments designed for manageable, cooperative, goal-oriented behavior.” (1986). To clarify the notion of *Organization* in this context a definition by Tubbs and Moss is made use of here: “An organization is often defined as a collection of individuals who, through a hierarchy of ranks and division of labor, seek to achieve a predetermined goal.” (2003).

3.3 Human Resources

As the study focuses on the views of HR Managers it is vital to understand the term of *Human Resources*. It involves the people that staff and operate an organization; as contrasted with the financial and material resources of an organization. Human Resources is also the organizational function that deals with the people and issues related to people such as compensation, hiring, performance management, and training. A Human Resource is a single person or employee within your organization. (cf. Tracey 2004). It can also be defined as “the division of a company that is focused on activities relating to employees. These

activities normally include recruiting and hiring of new employees, orientation and training of current employees, employee benefits, and retention. Formerly called personnel.” (business dictionary 2011, 1D). Described by its responsible tasks the term Human Resources stands for: “The department or support systems responsible for personnel sourcing and hiring, applicant tracking, skills development and tracking, benefits administration and compliance with associated government regulations.” (Entrepreneur 2011, 1E).

4 THEORY

In this chapter the three main theories appearing relevant to the topic of face-to-face communication in comparison to a mediated communication will be presented. The factors influencing the choice for a certain way play a specific role in this context. The discussion of these theories in connection to the data results is carried out in chapter 8 *Analysis*.

4.1 The Human Resources Approach

The subject of this study is assigned to the field of organizational communication. Miller (2009) concentrates on many theories and their development over the years in her work “Organizational Communication”. One of these theories that is related to this project is the Human Resources Approach. This approach includes all channels of communication implemented in an organization and does not emphasize one specifically. Their usage depends on the intention of the sender and the circumstances of the situation. These channels are among others the personal or face-to-face communication and the written communication via E-mail or notes/paper (cf. Miller 2009, p. 50/51). Miller explains that immediate feedback and a higher consideration of nonverbal cues are very distinct in face-to-face interactions. Central for the idea of the Human Resources Approach and respective organizations is the strength to draw on people’s abilities and knowledge in the most efficient way in order to develop an organization’s productivity to the maximum. Miller further follows the theoretical view that “sometimes these resources can best be utilized through face-to-face contact in meetings.” (p. 51). In other contexts an E-mail or paper material appears as the right option for communicating a certain issue. From this it follows that the choice of a channel is depending on the purpose, circumstances and the communication matter at hand.

4.2 The Media Richness Theory

The Media Richness Theory is a theory that concerns information processing and communication effectiveness. It assumes that the choice for a certain communication channel is depending on two factors: the purpose or equivocality of the message and the property of the particular channel. Equivocality is defined “as the ambiguity of the task, caused by conflicting interpretations about a group situation or environment.” (Davis 2006, 1F). The aim is to reduce ambiguity through a conscious media selection and eventually facilitate the understanding. Therefore the attention is directed towards increasing information and subsequently decreasing equivocality and uncertainty. Trevino, Lengel and Draft claim that communication matters involving a high level of uncertainty “require a communication channel that is relatively “rich” (e. g. face-to-face interaction), whereas tasks with a low level of uncertainty require a communication channel that is relatively “lean” (e. g. written communication).” (Miller 2009, p.51). Different research studies have examined and ranked the ways of communication with regard to its richness. The criteria on which the ranking is based on are the feedback, multiple cues, language variety and personal focus. “Face-to-face communication was found to be the richest medium followed by telephone, email, written addressed documents and unaddressed documents.”, also called memos and letters (Goliath 2005, 1G). If HR Managers achieve a good balance between the chosen media and the level of equivocality in a message then they can reduce the uncertainty level and thus obtain effective communication in their organizations. This is shared by Fann and Smeltzer (1989) as they state that a more effective communication can be reached when the media richness level is matched with the respective messages ambiguity level. Davis also refers to the implication of the theory which claims that written media is favored for unequivocal messages and the face-to-face way for messages that involve equivocality (cf. 2006, 1F).

4.3 Social Influence Theory

Apart from the reduction of equivocality and uncertainty researchers believe that there are other factors influencing the media choice. According to the Social Influence Theory by Fulk and DeSanctis (1999) group norms, peer attitudes and the social climate of an organization have an impact on a person’s selection of media channels. Moreover they may also affect the initial decision and use of new media in the company. In regard to the results this would mean that the respondents choose certain ways of communication because either the organization itself uses those ways or the staff members have some preferences and thereby influence the others. Basically such an influence is dependent on the company and its respective tools. Employees can only make use of communication tools that are provided by the company. Further they can make suggestions to introduce new media for communication purposes within the department or organization.

5 RESEARCH INTEREST

5.1 Research Subject

In terms of a concrete research subject two facets can be distinguished according to Helfferich (2005): the facet as regards content and the theoretical-methodological facet that determines the status of what the researcher intends to present as results (cf. p. 148). This study is based on the interest in the role of face-to-face communication within the context of internal and external communication processes of HR Personnel in leading positions. At their workplace other available ways of communication are highly linked to this aspect and complement the framework of the subject in order to form a holistic view and appraisal. From this it follows that the face-to-face communication contrasts a rather mediated communication in the daily interaction of the respective people with their environment and is to be explored in a comparative way. The content-related facet mainly deals with the face-to-face communication as one specific way of interaction. Connected interpretation patterns and subjective theories represent the basis of the theoretical-methodological facet. Each employee in the field of HR uses different ways of communication for certain purposes and reasons. In regard to the particular handling structures company- and employee dependent patterns are to be expected. According to the second facet it subsequently applies that these interpretation patterns and subjective theories concerning the f2f communication are elaborated.

5.2 Research Objectives

In connection to the research subject following objectives are to be attained and discussed and serve as orientation guidelines: As an overall goal the significance of the face-to-face communication at the workplace will be described. Its characteristics and circumstances play a decisive role in this context. In a deeper step concrete examples chosen from practice give information about advantages or disadvantages of different implemented communication channels and explain the motives and conditions of the chosen person that determine the choice for the particular way of communication. Further different situations and usual consequences of a face-to-face contact compared to a mediated interaction support the understanding of each HR- and Executive Manager's decision and eventually help to clarify the importance of each communication channel at their workplaces. In addition this project aims to offer results which are especially interesting for other stakeholders and decision makers in the field of Human Resources, internal and external communications and any other individual that studies a related topic of organizational communication.

5.3 Research Question

Based on the previous considerations the research interest has to be framed by a research question. Kromrey (2002) describes the following steps as the exploration of the research interest on the research subject which concludes with a segmentation of the research question in its special facets, the so-called dimensional analysis, in order to establish and motivate an adequate research design (cf. p. 111). The described interest will be analyzed by means of the following research question:

- ✧ *Which role does the face-to-face communication play in the work of Human Resources Managers?*

5.3.1 Dimensional Analysis

Based on the research question and the purpose of the study several dimensions of the empirical research subject can be formulated that are specifically relevant. The aim of the dimensional analysis is the development of a significant notion system that demonstrates the frame for a descriptive research study (cf. Kromrey 2002). The following figure gives an overview of relevant dimensions.

F2F Communication	HR Work	HR Person	Other Channels
Motives	Experience		Alternatives
Situations (examples)	Life / Career Examples		E-Mail
Preferences	Internal/ External Communication	Interview	Phone
Advantages/ Disadvantages	Position		Intranet
Limitations	Likes		Social Media / Networks
Circumstances /Conditions			Interplay with f2f
Consequences			
Interplay with other channels			

Fig. 1: dimensional Analysis (own illustration)

There are four main dimensions (*F2F Communication, HR Work, HR Person, Other Channels*) which have sub-dimensions arranged below them. In some cases the sub-dimensions belong to more than one main dimension and are therefore grouped below the two respective ones f. e. *Experience* arranged to HR Work and HR Person. This means that possible experience questions for the interviews were asked both concerning the current work that HR Managers do and the general work experiences they have made in the Human Resources area. The sub-dimension *Alternatives* refers to situations where the respondents rely on other channels besides face-to-face communication which are different from the ones mentioned below (*E-Mail, Phone, Intranet* etc.). One of them could be Video Conferencing techniques. Others target company specific tools such as certain software or programmes. The role of the dimensional Analysis is the exploration of the research question in order to analyze the different implementations and to get a more narrowed perspective in regard to the interview questions. Thus it serves as a support tool for the structuring of the research process.

6 METHODOLOGY

6.1 Principles of qualitative research

The qualitative research includes all methods, which are interpretive, naturalistic and reflexive and therefore help to describe and comprehend the given social realities in an open way. This research method reconstructs meaning or subjective perception such as everyday theories, interpretation patterns and reality concepts. Its research purpose manifests in *understanding* (cf. Helfferich 2005). The following principles illustrate critical characteristics of qualitative research being particularly interesting for this study:

Openness/Holism: avoidance of a pre-filtering of reality through the formulation of hypotheses, openness towards the respondents, situations and methods, no strict assessment concept in precast measuring scales, more complex data acquisition through an open problem formulation and non-standardized answers

Communication/Interaction: high degree of these aspects in f. e. qualitative interviews between respondents and evaluators, evaluation as a communicative process, low non-response-rate

Process orientation: procedural, practice-oriented action- and interpretation patterns as the object of research interest instead of static facts, comprehension of the respondents' development of actions, views and opinions

Reflexivity: explored situations and conceptions reflect the individual social context, meaning can refer to other meanings, motivation and deepened questioning which leads to reflection of hitherto results, false conclusions can be prevented

Flexibility: freedom of respondent's expressions in f. e. qualitative surveys, possible adjustments of research direction, implementation of diverse acquisition methods, immediate reaction to acquired insight

With this overview the most central aspects of this research study are provided and give a directed indication for the following methodological proceeding (cf. Kuckartz et al 2007).

6.2 Method of the qualitative Interview

Especially the method of qualitative questioning appears to clearly qualify for the analysis of the chosen research matter. In connection with this method an explorative approach is involved.

A theory-governed proceeding was not considered in this research process as the existing research in this field does not offer specific theories concerning the topic. Consequently the study focuses on a relatively new subject for which currently only a modicum of significant knowledge exists and in which it was reliant on preferably open - i. e. little or non-standardized- acquisition instruments, f. e. guided interviews (cf. Kromrey 2002).

Also in terms of the research objectives (5.2 Research Objectives) the choice for the qualitative interview appeared as a reasonable decision for the exploration of the different aspects of the research subject "face-to-face communication". In consideration of the explained principles the relevant dimensions of the research interest (5.3.1 Dimensional Analysis) were explored accordingly. Eventually this method elaborated about the individual perceptions and subjective theories of the particular respondents.

The qualitative questioning is a type of the partly standardized oral questioning supported by an interview compendium. In view of this research method a partly standardization qualifies very well for this study since a certain structuring of the interview situation establishes the basis for asking about nearly the same content and for an orientation to the actual research problem during the interview. Therefore this type of interview is also called "problem-centered interview" or "focused interview" in some literature (cf. Mayring 2002). The interviews are based on the described problem formulation which the interviewer introduced in the beginning and always returned to. The research subject was analyzed by the interviewer beforehand and specific aspects were identified. Those are composed in an interview compendium (Appendix: The Interview Compendium p. 48) and are discussed in the course of the conversation.

Although there is a certain pre-structuring, the interview is nevertheless not a full-standardized method of questioning (cf. Mayring 2002). There were mainly open questions functioning; subsequent questions were asked in order to deepen the knowledge and enable inferences. Most characteristic was the fact that the respondents had the opportunity to co-

structure the interview situation. This was an advantage in the way that certain relevant aspects could be discussed in the interviews which the respondents considered important but were not explicitly asked about.

The choice of the respondents was based on primary selection i. e. the individuals were gathered consciously in the sample but did not have to cover a certain feature distribution. Crucial was the fact that the interview respondents were HR Managers of different companies in Sweden and/or responsible for Human Resources responsibilities in their departments. The number of respondents was not fixed but depended on the interviews' outcome. It was decided about the termination of the interviewing process as soon as a saturation level was assigned. This is usually reached when the input of following interviews is not due to provide new information.

The following figure shows the choice of respondents:

Name	Position	Organization
Bertil Nilsson	Senior Executive Advisor	Berg Propulsion Sweden AB
Magnus Wahlgård	Director of HR, Strategy & Competence Management	Volvo Information Technology
Ann-Britt Karlsson	Personnel Administrator, Faculty Secretary	IT Faculty GU
Eva Hansdotter	Senior Vice President, Group People & Business Excellence	SKF Sverige AB
Bengt Olsson	HR Director	Göteborgs-Posten
Camilla Jacobsohn	Head of Administration & Personnel	Chalmers University of Technology
Andreas Rådlund	Internal Social Network, IT & Services	Telefonaktiebolaget LM Ericsson
Johannes Eng	Executive Manager & Recruiting Consultant Göteborg	Michael Page International

Fig. 2: overview of interview respondents with respective competency (own illustration)

6.3 Research Tool

In the ongoing research process the development of an appropriate exploration tool followed. According to 6.2 Method of the qualitative Interview the chosen interview type was supported by an interview compendium. By means of this compendium the information could be gathered exploratory during the interviews. In addition this tool helped to structure the course of the conversation, to remember to ask important aspects and to be geared to the central research objectives. Consequently the compendium consists of those questions that appeared to be important from the researcher's perspective (cf. Kuckartz et al 2007).

At first the form of the questions had to align the principles of qualitative research (cf. 6.1). The sequence guaranteed a well-arranged course during the interviews so that the attention could be directed to the respondents. Thereby the respondents were introduced with "easy" questions and attitude- and evaluation questions were put preferably in the end. Eventually it seemed meaningful to give the respondents the possibility to draw a balance or to complement the given statements at certain points (cf. Helfferich 2005).

The interview compendium, that underlies the research purpose of this study, reflects the insight interest by its thematic constellation and has been developed from the dimensional analysis of the research question. Some topics are divided in main- and subsequent questions or rather contain questions that are only being asked under certain conditions. The complete compendium is to be found in the Appendix (cf. Appendix p. 48).

6.4 Data Collection and Reprocessing

The qualitative interviews were conducted with the respondents at the agreed times (Fig. 3). The a priori created compendium acted as a supporting tool in the process. To ensure an accurate data collection and due to subjective and intersubjective traceability all interviews were recorded by means of a digital sound recording. Also in regard to the subsequent evaluation this processing appeared as a meaningful measure.

First after having conducted the interviews the reprocessing of the collected material followed. Here a proper representation was chosen. As the interview content consisted of complex meaning correlations and representational statements, the written language was recommended, i. e. the written text as an appropriate form (cf. Mayring 2002). Hence the process in which spoken language, f. e. from interviews, is transformed in a written frame is called transcription (cf. *ibid*).

The verbal transcription implies certain rules that had to be considered. Any dialect was bowdlerized, syntax mistakes were corrected and the style was evened (cf. Mayring 2002). This technique legitimated its application especially in the questioning method where the

focus of interest lies on the content- and subject level. In addition to these guidelines other concrete transcription rules according to Kuckartz et al (2007) were considered during the reprocessing of the interview material. These integrate the following: affirmative and positive utterances by the respondents (Mhm, Aha etc.) were not transcribed as long as they did not interrupt the fluency of the speaker. The interviewer is indicated by an "I", the respondent by an "R", followed by their respective number (f. e. "R4:"). Each turn-taking is defined through a double click of the enter key (a blank line) between the speakers in order to enhance the readability (cf. p. 27 ff).

As a formal supplement each paragraph in the transcription is marked with a consecutive number. Every transcribed interview starts with number "1" in the first paragraph.

6.5 Analysis Procedure

After the transcription of the interviews followed the analysis of the data in several steps. The aim was to capture the respondents' statements in certain categories and on this basis attain a final presentation of the results. The chosen procedure refers to different approaches of qualitative evaluation as this responds to the specific requirements of the research interest and data material underlying this study. Subsequently a stronger integration could be provided by combining established qualitative evaluation methods in terms of the subject matter. "In qualitative research practice this has partly been done long ago." (Mayring 2002, p. 133). The interpretation of the collected and reprocessed data was basically supported by the qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2002). During the following steps a theoretical imitation of Kuckartz et al (2007) and Bortz/Döring (2006) was helpful in addition. First a category system based on the evaluation purposes and the compendium was created. This system contains the chosen categories, structured in main- and sub-categories, and a corresponding explanation (cf. Kuckartz et al 2007; Mayring 2002). Due to suggestions of Bortz/Döring (2006) this system was complemented and revised in respective area in accordance with an inductive procedure (cf. 6.5.1 Induction and Grounded Theory).

Afterwards the interviews were coded. Therefore the transcriptions were screened according to the categories (cf. 7.1 Category System) and relevant text passages were selected and coded for the corresponding category. For this procedure only those text passages were coded that were relevant for the comprehension of the particular information; redundant passages and doublings were not considered in the coding. This compensated for a paraphrasing. In a next step concrete examples were extracted for interpretation (cf. Bortz/Döring 2006). The resulting data was interpreted in terms of the research topic. Eventually the possibility was given to present the research results by means of a category-based evaluation. This type of evaluation refers to the described analysis

procedure. Therefore the categories themselves serve as headlines and provide the structure for chapter 7 Data Results.

6.5.1 Induction and Grounded Theory

As mentioned above the procedural method of analysis aligns with the approach of induction. It means that the study focuses on reasoning from the results to a theory or theories that may explain the observations. The researcher decides in the end which theoretical approaches provide the best explanation of the phenomenon (cf. Treadwell 2011). Based on that the study was driven by results rather than theory as this implies the qualitative analysis of human decision making and behavioral patterns. Thus it considers theory as “grounded in data” and refers to Glaser’s and Strauss’s Grounded Theory (1967). This technique corresponds to the category-based evaluation described earlier in this chapter. Regarding this study the statements of the interviews were being assessed due to each category and finally assigned to the most appropriate one. Thereby some categories were reviewed and revised in the data processing in correspondence with the constant comparative method (cf. *ibid.*). In order to be an open and unbiased researcher approaching this field the previous study of relevant theories was rather marginal in accordance to the principles of the research method. The Grounded Theory approach was chosen because it corresponded with the current research background in this field. As studies with this research topic do not exist so far the data results should augment the already existing knowledge and propose appropriate theories as well as being compared to already proven theories.

7 DATA RESULTS

The following part presents the research results of the conducted interviews. The presentation is structured according to the categories and their titles which eventually provide the headlines.

7.1 Category System

H R P r o f e s s i o n

Experience in HR

Likes

Used ways of communication

Current tasks, job position, years of experience, likes about the job, overview of all the used channels

F a c e - t o - F a c e S i t u a t i o n s

Motives and Advantages

Circumstances / Conditions

Consequences

Reasons and typical situations when f2f is used, what are influencing factors and usual outcomes, individual preferences partly compared to other channels, distinctive features of f2f, uniqueness, what is valued most, under what circumstances does f2f take place, balancing of certain aspects

M e d i a t e d C o m m u n i c a t i o n

Description of situations for using other channels of communication besides f2f

I n t e r p l a y F a c e - t o - F a c e a n d O t h e r C h a n n e l s

Complementation/ Improvement of Face-to-Face

Face-to-Face Limitations and Drawbacks

Disadvantages and Dangers of Other Channels

Combination of f2f situations and mediated communication, how to make f2f communication more effective by the use of other channels, avoidance of f2f contact, disadvantages of f2f and other channels

S e c o n d C h o i c e

How to solve a f2f communication situation in an alternative way, is f2f replaceable?

T h e I n t e r v i e w S i t u a t i o n

Differences in the communication setting and respective channel, based on the close example of high involvement concerning each conducted interview

7.2 HR Profession

7.2.1 Experience in HR

The respondents account for certain positions and tasks in their roles as HR Responsibles. They all have many years of work experience in the field of Human Resources and hold leading positions in different companies, regionally and globally. Their tasks focus on different aspects of leadership, team development and management, especially in terms of compensation, connection, resignation, training and talent and knowledge management. From a more concrete perspective they support Global Managers, a global expansion and Division Networking. In all that the respondents influence the staff members to behave in a proper fashion, set frameworks and strategy plans for the company's and people development and occupy areas such as business excellence, consultancy, service delivery and diversity and change management. Eventually they deal with the recruitment, employment and termination of staff, take charge of the introduction to the departments and offer guidance in all work-related concerns.

7.2.2 Likes

The work offers a big variety and freedom in the way of structuring and organization. They like to define influential and successful activities and to choose the right HR tools such as people development talks and culture value assessments. Specifically appreciated is the day-to-day meeting, working and interacting with people and the holistic picture gained by the job. In connection to that all respondents enjoy to get to know new people and being inspired by their motivation. Moreover being involved in interesting discussions and part of a learning process is viewed as enrichment.

“R5: What I like most is meeting people, working together with people because I love people and in this way it is the best job you can have in the whole world, you get to interact with people and get their motivation and get them involved in all areas we are working with. (R5, 4).

As very supportive and characteristic for this work they emphasize the collaborative culture and the interaction with clients and candidates f. e. in interviews where they gain insight in their values, different lifestyles and work life experiences. Another exciting aspect is to find new business, drive the development by listening to business requirements and handling competition. The fact of having a vision can clear the way for an outstanding experience in the course of the job as guiding the journey with workshops and debates, implementing the idea with different strategies and changing behaviors and even mindsets may either make

somebody being a pioneer or in any case lead to a contributing practice for each participant. In their daily work life the respondents describe it as a fascinating part to manage a team and contribute to common goals in order to move the whole company forward. After all every HR Responsible is satisfied and comfortable with his or her job, very people-oriented and holds the right sense for a balance in people and business management.

7.2.3 Used ways of communication

In some companies staff surveys are conducted to find out how people perceive the company, the leadership and working situation and what own goals are. There do exist divergent opinions about the usage of the telephone. Some state they use it less frequent and rely on other channels instead whereas others use the phone far too seldom, would like to use it more often or cannot imagine to work without it. Sometimes they spend five till six hours a day having phone conferences between two cities' offices and also make use of the texting/SMS function. Video conferences and virtual/ live meetings play an important role on a regional and global basis which is combined with the WebEx technology as well. The written communication is also very popular among the companies today. Especially E-mails constitute the main part of the communication character and are said to be used far too much. Therefore some respondents are trying to get away from E-mail and use Microblogging much more as it drives increased transparency. Other examples are Microsoft Outlook Communicator and chat functions in order to avoid spamming somebody's mailbox and seeing people's availability. Certainly the face-to-face communication offers several possibilities. In the first place are ranked meetings within the departments with employees and bosses on a regular basis and direct talks with colleagues. Some work and office conditions (cf. "Circumstances and Conditions") influence the face-to-face occasions such as office talks and the fact that the HR Responsibles are depended on networking and relations build on trust and mutual knowing. Therefore people have to meet in person in order to create stable relations over the years. Those relations later make it easier to call a person or communicate without meeting f2f.

"R4: [...] the relations that are there are pretty stable which makes it easy to pick up the phone or communicate without necessarily meeting physically. However there are certain ways of getting things done that absolutely require meeting f2f in order to be efficient." (R4, 6).

The face-to-face communication, phone and E-mail are also used for the external communication with clients. Another way of communication across departments is the intranet to provide information, sometimes in combination with an E-mail and the respective link. In general only a low number of blogs, wikis and discussion forums is

implemented since they require an active management in terms of people and budget but are viewed as great tools for knowledge share.

7.3 Face-to-Face Situations

7.3.1 Motives and Advantages

Having a face-to-face conversation can have many advantages compared to mediated communication. The respondents explain different motives and reasons for choosing the personal communication channel in certain situations and highlight several factors that make this way of communication so unique. Most important is the fact that it creates trust and energy on each side and that there is another truth in f2f because of non-verbal and not openly expressed issues and people can perceive who the other person is when meeting f2f. It offers a greater possibility of influencing people and changing their way of thinking as well as it allows getting ideas and closer to the truth and to each other. This results in a better understanding of questions and expectations. The respondents describe f2f as a more rewarding, natural and relaxed conversation in which it is easier to navigate and, if preferable, to be more ambiguous. In addition to that it is inspiring to meet people. Compared to E-mail a f2f dialogue usually offers more fun and energy and should always be the chosen way for selling an idea and convincing people.

“R1: When we say f2f compared to mail we are comparing apples with oranges to a certain extend because the f2f allows me to see where you are and it might also allow me to see when you understand or not or if you are really nodding and I get closer right and the possibility to influence becomes greater in that sense. It is very hard to sell in an idea by sending an email.” (R1, 54).

The respondents define f2f as the best choice for communicating matters of a sensitive nature in order to read somebody's face, see the reaction and adjust the way of communication much easier. Very important and multiple mentioned is the possibility to read reactions and to transmit, receive and respond properly as well as to deal with the consequences immediately. Moreover the personal communication implements the attainment of a holistic view which involves perceiving emotions, thoughts, feelings, attitudes and body language. For Managers and Team leaders with responsible tasks it is significant to know how the staff feels and how they understand things as it highly influences a good atmosphere at the workplace. Also a good intuition can be quite helpful in recruiting personnel and this only appears in f2f. The personal communication makes a big difference in the impression that a person leaves as one combines the first f2f contact with previous information, experiences and own value thinking and an impression based on previous paper

information can be completely different, both negative and positive; so f2f influences and changes impressions of people, mostly applicants in this case. For the respondents it is especially important to meet in person when people plan to stay in the company for a longer time and it is nicer to have a face in that case, both for the recruiter and the colleagues. Another crucial characteristic of a f2f contact is that it offers the best basis for following contacts through any other channel in terms of providing a comfortable feeling and relieving some contact barriers. For this reason they all prefer having at least a first initial f2f meeting.

“R3: To see who it is and how the person acts. It’s easier when I have met somebody and later we have email contact which we have all the time, but if I have met the person then it’s much easier to feel comfortable with how I write and answer and I can understand the person’s questions better if I have met and seen them before.” (R3, 10).

Generally this way of communication facilitates the whole work of an HR Manager but the choice also depends on the matter and purpose. The respondents prefer f2f especially in case of difficulties in communication and tricky situations. But f2f also supports the creativity, interactivity, clarity and vividness and improves teamwork and mutual help. In few cases and probably less obvious the personal laziness can be an influencing factor to choose f2f instead of writing long texts for example. Like no other approach the f2f communication enables the highest degree of small talk and the freedom to start a conversation more informal which creates serenity and openness for the following course of action. In days of lacking time a personal talk with nearby colleagues can bring faster results than talking over the phone or E-mail. A good motivation is always the goal to be successful in the delivery of candidates and to achieve a higher quality of the delivered work. Curiosity and interest in people give further inducement. The respondents enjoy the advantage that f2f increases motivation and efficiency in their organizations through the influence and empowerment of staff members. They refer to the business benefits by having experienced that the more people you meet the better the hit rate and the final success become, both on the candidate and the client side. Ultimately the results and the leadership profit by it and the respondents believe that a business without f2f would be impossible.

“R8: If everyone should work from home for example then this business wouldn’t be possible [...]” (R8, 12).

7.3.2 Circumstances and Conditions

The interviews show that the face-to-face contact is in principle indispensable in the respondents’ work since they have incorporated it in numerous activities that are determined by certain conditions. Typical situations are leadership coaching and seminars in

different areas. Besides feelings and simply human nature influence the choice for or against this channel, especially the own lack of courage:

“R1: Instead of confronting face-to-face I might choose to write an angry email.” (R1, 40).

The most obvious occasions are meetings. The respondents reflect about many ordinary meetings, reviews and regular personnel meetings that are conditioned by the conversation about the work progress and news such as forwarding information from the top management. Those meetings create a platform for employees to give feedback concerning their projects and responsibilities and for a group decision making using the ARL (Action-Reflection-Learning) method. Other types of f2f meetings are salary negotiation meetings, job introduction meetings and client and candidate introduction meetings. Especially meetings with organizations concerning important positions are extraordinarily f2f oriented as well as difficult meetings in order to see the entire reaction. Another circumstance for meeting in person is given before making contracts. The respondents then prefer to see who they are going to collaborate with. For workshops, brainstorming sessions and any encounters that deal with creativity matters it is crucial to meet f2f and to feel the atmosphere in the room. In connection to that it is viewed as extremely important to hold presentations for getting people's initiative and support for own ideas and anchoring things.

“R7: When I want people to be creative or need to freak out on a whiteboard to get my message through, need to explain or draw things, have an interactive discussion and so on, those kind of meetings are preferably f2f.” (R7, 14).

Face-to-face meetings also take place on condition of evaluation purposes of a candidate delivery together with the client and a discussion about the future work. Other incidences of f2f communications inherently involved by the job itself are corridor and coffee machine chats and chats in airports and taxis because people spend a lot of time with their colleagues in these logistic activities. It is given by the job to talk to people. The choice is always a matter of time management and efficiency that is challenged and needs to be balanced. Other crucial factors are the priority, complexity and delicacy of a matter. The sender also has to consider the circumstances of the receiver which is particularly important in a global setting. The context, topic, individual and desired result influences the choice as well. Usually it is not one way being superior to another but:

“R4: [...] it's more about understanding when does what have the best impact and when to use combinations.” (R4, 16).

What happens very often is that the respondents and their colleagues meet in an office and discuss problem solutions, work betterments, news and unclarities that occur in their daily work. If a boss needs more personnel or other support he may send an E-mail or a call to the HR Head of Department and then they meet for a deeper work discussion. The content of most f2f conversations is quite problem-oriented and influenced by the degree of empowerment of the staff members because as long as everything works well and the employees work independently and self-consciously the need to meet is rather low.

“R6: I don’t meet people just to meet them. I meet them because it’s necessary or we have a question or sth important to talk about [...]” (R6, 24).

Many job-related questions such as salary, resources and special tools are being answered in a f2f context. They sometimes do not see any other way as appropriate to explain tasks and used systems in a demonstrative way. At times a few private subjects are part of colleagues’ discussions concerning employment and the like. The probability of having a f2f contact supplementary depends on the fact of acting either globally or regionally so that distances and travel opportunities are decisive. Subsequently the own willingness and necessity to travel influences one’s decision. Therefore the respondents always challenge the purpose to travel for hours, the number of people needed, the location for a meeting and eventually the cost-efficiency. Then they combine the views and conclude if everything is justifiable or not. In the back of their minds they additionally keep the fact that the employees do not enjoy being constantly at the airports even though it sometimes is unavoidable. The expected character of a planned meeting may make the respondents decide for the f2f channel:

“R4: [...] the more uncomfortable a meeting the more I prefer face-to-face.” (R4, 8).

Tough messages are best discussed in this way. This also applies to situations where they see that an E-mal can trigger long and complicated discussions. Then they either continue it f2f or over the phone as a further option. One respondent emphasizes the significance of all employees in the entire arrangement:

“R5: We are a knowledge company and we have one main resource which is the people working for us, they are our tool, our investment and the whole company.” (R5, 14).

Eventually all job interviews for a full-time position are being held f2f so that the respondents are able to feel if a person fits in the company or not.

7.3.3 Consequences

After a face-to-face contact has taken place it is important for future decisions to evaluate the outcomes and common consequences. Prevalent is the idea of having a better feeling afterwards for the reason of possessing the right influence and control in a given situation. Empirically it also is a good way to defuse in conflicts or challenges as it supports the relaxation and decreases the tension. A person's appearance and attitude have a huge impact in job interviews:

"R6: Then you realize if people fit in the company or not. So a face-to-face meeting can have negative consequences in terms of a personal impression which may have been good from what it sounded like at the paper. But it can also be the other way around [...]. So delivering the right attitude in a face-to-face meeting makes the difference." (R6, 22).

An absolutely positive consequence is the better and opener understanding of for example goals and reasons in and after an interaction. This message does not have the same effect in any other channel, not least because of the non-verbal communication. A personal interaction also drives efficiency in communication, time and in targeting a message and thus creates more enthusiasm and motivation. As one result people get a more competitive organization. The professionalism of the job is a natural implication, especially in the Human Resources area:

"R3: Even if I don't like a person I won't show that, I have to pretend that I like them, that's my job. I try to be very professional." (R3, 18).

But of course as everywhere in the world it also happens in the respondents' work life that sometimes there is no match or agreement between people. On the contrary a contact can become more private based on trust and built confidence. Even one initial personal meeting can result in a better future communication, also in terms of possible barriers that are removed.

"R7: What happens quite a lot of times is that people refer to the fact that you met in person, then it's much easier to pick up the phone and call someone if you met the person before because then you sort of removed the barrier. Someone you haven't met in person is normally much more of an obstacle to get in touch with. Of course it depends on the kind of topic you are going to discuss, but there still is some more resistance." (R7, 16).

As an enrichment of own experiences and therefore more than welcome are meetings considered that outreach expectations in terms of the respective outcome, for example the change of mindset on any behalf. The respondents do not see that could have happened in other channels. It may be a consequence of the clearness in f2f as it can bring forward tough and unpopular messages as well. But face-to-face is not always being seen as outstanding as other ways of communication can bring more clarity and sharpness to be more specific. Hence in an emotional discussion there is room for the interpretation and calibration of words and the meaning of such words can be eventually misinterpreted. After all the respondents all stated that they usually have a positive outcome after a face-to-face contact.

“R3: Usually we get good contact when people come because then we have the possibility to discuss and explain and we understand each other better. I can’t remember if I ever had a negative outcome after a personal meeting.” (R3, 18).

7.4 Mediated Communication

In comparison to face-to-face there are many other ways of communicating internally and externally and various situations for using those ways. One of them is the phone which the respondents nowadays use when E-mail does not work or when they do not get a response. Sending text messages via SMS function is used in order to get short messages through without thinking of disturbing a person and for practical reasons to simply get it off. Complicated matters that can be misunderstood may be easier explained on the phone than in an E-mail so that assumptions about long discussions via E-mail and a possible misunderstanding among sender and receiver may very likely lead to the continuation over phone. That is in some cases the only way to communicate since people are often outside their offices. Nevertheless it can be hard to reach them when they are away. According to the respondents a phone call also supports the interaction with colleagues and clients which they have not met and worked with for a longer time. Some of them spend five or six hours a day on the phone having phone conferences between two offices in different cities. Another situation for which an E-mail may be as good is the end of a delivery with a client, provided that they have already met face-to-face before.

The channel with probably the highest amount of traffic is E-mail. The content can be anything from extracting contracts or salaries until informing and giving/ getting instructions and orders, for instance informing the right office about made changes in salaries and sending short messages about tasks and contact requests. Because of the distributed structure of many institutions it is very convenient and saves time. Another advantage of E-mail is that it is very clear and the words do not change:

“R1: If I say a green car in the mail, then it is a green car, it is not a blue car, you can see it there [...].” (R1, 24).

Further reasons are answering questions that are coming via E-mail, reminding staff and inviting them for meetings, asking for, collecting and sending out information and having brief discussions on professional matters. Very popular but still viewed as a poor habit is the sending of an E-mail to somebody in the building instead of going to that person and have a f2f talk, even though they are only two rooms away.

“R4: Probably the people I email the most are the ones in this building because it is easy to get it done and I’ll see them anyway. Colleagues from other parts of the country or other countries think we working in Gothenburg have an advantage being at the same place which is not the case, because we are more off than somewhere else, either physically or in phone meetings, webEx etc. And since you know the people here it’s easier to send a mail.” (R4, 22).

But sending an E-mail can seem lazy and one has to be careful about the written words because the receiver’s reaction to it is unknown. Some respondents do not use E-mail so much anymore because they want more transparency. They observed that there is an increased traffic outside office hours between five and eleven when people are out of their meetings. Others conduct conversations with their clients over E-mail and include a colleague in summaries of discussions or reviews. An obvious advantage of this channel when asking for a contract signing or a candidate presentation is having this conversation in a written formal way and in print for possible questions afterwards. As in case of the phone, when there is no answer over E-mail, people send an E-mail when they do not get a reply over the phone.

Besides these two ways there are many other tools to use for a mediated communication. All booking of meetings runs through Outlook. Some have two-way dialogues within a blog, discussion forum or a chat function to get their colleagues’ views (instead of spamming their mail boxes) or use a share point solution to place staff information, product and technology news and thus make it available for everybody. Blogs in many environments are unfortunately still used for a one-way communication which does not conform to its intention but this is a matter of changing the user behavior. Moreover it is an interesting challenge for many employees that use Social Media outside their offices but have to rely on only E-mails inside the office. There are big differences in the incorporation of modern behavior between companies today. Another challenge is the difference between Senior Management on the one hand and the generation growing up with internet technologies on the other hand and the association of both. Because of the growing generation shift companies need to have very good and modern tools to be appealing for the next generation.

“R2: Because if you come to a company and the way they communicate is very different from what you are used to of course this is a less attractive employer.” (R2, 46).

There will be a lack of research and talent unless they do move forward in their way of communication. An online technology called ReachMe is applied to announce new open positions. Interested applicants can therefore login and send their CVs and application documents. The HR Manager is then able to communicate with all applicants at the same time in a written form. Hence this tool is viewed as being very efficient and helpful. For the recruiting the respondents take advantage of several channels. They use the daily news, arbetsförmedlingen and the consulting of academic work or manpower. Additionally they announce all new positions on their homepage and communicate them through their academic networks. Another technology is WebEx which is used in order to share material while having an online meeting with somebody. It is more developed than video conferences and has no delays. To reach many people the respondents send out newsletters with cascading information to all the staff and publish internal news videos once a quarter. A group address book with search function and an organizational chart are always available to everybody. The most common external communication tools for reaching the public are press releases according to certain topics. In cases of communicating financial results, having messages with clear facts without a reasonable possibility to debate and discuss and sending information to all staff members at the same time quickly and clear face-to-face is no adequate channel.

The opinions and user behavior diverge when it comes to video conferences. Some respondents say that live meetings with screens are more and more common. They use the Skype technology for conducting global interviews with scientific personnel instead of travelling long distances. Being a global company from the start some of them put important position meetings increasingly in an online environment using teleconferences and screen sharing. They even go to such lengths as by deploying video conferences globally as a good substitute for f2f they consider it to be as good as anything and a replacement of f2f in terms of travelling for short meetings, especially now that it is getting better.

“R7: As video conferencing is as good as a face-to-face meeting I won’t put my money in an airline. You can make a more efficient use of an expert from a consultancy firm if you meet him for an hour in a video conference. For me it doesn’t make any difference from face-to-face.” (R7, 22).

Since they see the other person and a job interview is a fairly structured approach the respondents regard it as a good tool to communicate globally with candidates and conduct recruiting interviews. On this basis they also operate time and cost saving since it is more

efficient than taking the plane. In case people are located in the same city having video conferences instead of talking face-to-face does not make sense at all. Contrary to that other companies have too few facilities to fully implement the video conference technology in their daily work. It is not common to use it but if they do it is a huge matter among the employees, even though some respondents would like to use it more often and hope they will get more used to it.

“R5: [...] people would think why and get frighten. It’s not dramatic for me using it at home, because I love it, but here it would be a difference because it’s not so common, that’s the key factor.” (R5, 22).

Another reason is given by generational differences as younger staff members are more proficient in communicating through these channels. Similar to the real face-to-face contact the aspect of having a picture of somebody never met before gets people closer, gives topics to discuss and makes a connection by seeing the circumstances of the other person. A rather standard tool in most companies today is the intranet. It is designed as a one-to-many communication and used as a push channel to inform the staff and publish internal news at times. Hence it is a more formalized communication. Using only mediated ways of communication excludes the way of face-to-face contact. There are certain reasons that support this issue and make the respondents decide for the technologies and against f2f: laziness in terms of travelling, the efficiency of purposes and the fact that they can squeeze in more meetings when not being travelling. The global communication in an online context with offices in other cities, cultural and generational differences and future perspectives highlighting online and video communication are further influencing factors.

“R7: Young people entering a company are highly used to work in an online context and they won’t accept travelling for business that much.” (R7, 22).

There are also historical aspects such as the downturn that made some respondents use the WebEx technology and video conferences to a much larger extent and this helped them to become better in the handling. That is very important since the quality of a mediated contact partly depends on the ability to use such technologies. The other part is to behave in a certain way in order to have efficient meetings where everybody is contributing. According to the respondents the development is also so positive because people enjoy not being so much on the road. Although they felt the need to meet after the long period of downturn they realized that many affairs previously done by plane are also possible to carry out in different ways now. In general there underlies the principle to as far as possible give feedback by using the same channel as with the previous contact for example in cases of a negative job answer.

7.5 Interplay Face-to-Face and Other Channels

7.5.1 Complementation/ Improvement of Face-to-Face

The main statement regarding this part is that other ways of communication can improve the efficiency before and the clarification after a face-to-face meeting. This can be done in several ways. Sometimes people confirm a meeting via phone before or have pre-meetings to make decisions and save time for discussions and understanding in the actual meeting; this does not necessarily need to happen in f2f but in a discussion form as with the phone for example. Subsequent the respondents advise to back up important meetings and confirm decisions by writing a protocol during the meeting in order to be able to do adjustments and then send it around via E-mail to show the agreed points. This is a key thing for a successful and efficient meeting configuration. Depending on the topic it can be smart to follow up a meeting with a new meeting to increase the efficiency and settlement of tasks on the employee side.

“R7: I normally follow up a meeting with a new meeting, otherwise there is no way that people get things done, they are just overworked.” (R7, 20).

To do that one could also make a call to follow up instead of a meeting in case the number of people is low. This would add to the benefit of efficiency. On the other hand somebody should only follow up by phone if feelings are not included because you lose value over the phone and do not get a receipt as it is the case with E-mail. However phone can take the heat out coming from a previous meeting but should not be used to conclude on a subject. The respondents agree that it is appreciated and necessary to get material such as the structure, figures and strategy reports via E-mail before a meeting and to have an agenda for a better preparation and clear purpose. Then they can take some time to read it, build their opinion and be familiar with the discussed topics beforehand. Speeding up the meeting by providing background information and getting people on the same level of understanding and mindset makes f2f discussions more efficient and saves extra time. Before any important contact it is recommendable to inform yourself at the respective website so that questions can be clarified soon. Especially in the field of HR some documents are essential in the preparation process:

“R3: It is very important that I have some information for example CV about a person via email before I meet that person, especially when I have not been involved in the recruitment. Without this information it is very difficult to communicate about what is going to happen later [...].” (R3, 22).

It emerges that f2f and E-mail are all the time connected with each other in various activities. Another way of combination and mutual influence is the fact that topics occurring in E-mail, chat or intranet are taken up in f2f discussions and referred to on the intranet at times. The opportunities of Social Media have a distinctive feature. They excite the feeling of confidence when talking to each other f2f without the requirement that people have met each other before. This works by communicating through Social Media technologies and thus building trust over time:

“R7: It is a lot of small per se unimportant actions like liking on Facebook or commenting on something and after a period of time you relate something to the name of a person and feel that you want to connect with a person because that person says a lot of good stuff and that builds a lot of confidence without actually knowing that person, so the key for a global company is that we let people build an online identity as well as an offline identity because that’s the only way we can cooperate on a global basis and of course it has impact as well on how you perceive a person face-to-face because you already build a sense of trust before you actually meet someone. [...] So that’s an example of how a non face-to-face channel effects how you interact face-to-face.” (R7, 20).

Hence non-f2f channel do effect the f2f interaction. The respondents all use a combination of available channels for a good communicative effect and for getting the full picture because this combination can bring more clarity and sharpness to be specific in the meaning of content. Particularly the combination of text, words and voice including feelings is in most cases the right choice. Generally it is a question of assessing when does what have the best impact and when to use combinations. But sometimes it can also help to increase efficiency in f2f communication by eliminating certain actions. One example is a meeting-free week trying to see if the company would work nevertheless and the result showed that it did work fine:

“R5: [It] was more creative and found a few new solutions. We could skip some meetings because they were not really contributing to a result. [The reason for this week was that] people sometimes are only physically in a meeting but not mentally.” (R5, 20).

7.5.2 Face-to-Face Limitations and Drawbacks

The respondents explain which qualities they disapprove in the personal communication and for what reasons they would not prefer to have a f2f contact. At first the f2f communication involves a higher ambiguity and the possibility of being not so clear and thus may not be the best way to get such brief and clear messages through. It can be a demanding communication in terms of time management and space on the one hand and difficult and

demanding from a human perspective on the other hand as people are forced to take in where the other person is. When it comes to job interviews f2f is always challenged:

“R8: [...] it can be time and cost consuming to fly over here just for an interview [...].” (R8, 24).

In chat it is easier to come back quickly and add one forgotten issue. In f2f people may be shy and reluctant to confront as it is so close. Obviously it is unsuitable and impossible to use f2f for mass communication as well as it is viewed as being unnecessary for less important items. People prefer to take such issues of low involvement over the phone or E-mail instead. As in any other job there do occur uncomfortable meetings in the respondents' work life once a while. In such cases they may ask their colleagues for support in order to ease disagreements or difficult communication situations. Most of the times the inefficiency of having all meetings f2f and the fact that very long meetings are principally time consuming usually lead to a careful evaluation and the decision of having shorter but more frequent meetings. Apart from that people do not enjoy travelling and being at airports all the time. In the end experiences have shown that each alternative fits to certain occasions. The choice appears as a question of quality of life and costs and is in many cases negatively influenced by the key factor time. Regarding a circumvention of f2f the respondents do not see serious factors that would make them completely avoid a f2f contact, even after thinking about it for a while.

7.5.3 Disadvantages and Dangers of Other Channels

In comparison to the limitations and drawbacks of f2f communication there are, as a matter of course, many disadvantages and even dangers that a mediated communication implies. When people at work just sit in their offices and do not get up from their chairs they easily have an online communication instead which refers to the tendency of sending E-mails and even handle confrontations by that. Hence there occurs the high possibility of misinterpretation and the danger of becoming blocked easily and not reach a point because there are so many signals and information missing in E-mail and written communication cannot smooth conflicts but makes them even worse. What else is missing in writing is the fine-tuning of tone as getting only text opens up a lot of interpretation on the receiver's behalf. The tone, intention and feelings can sound different later.

“R4: You only know one thing when you send a message which is that the receiver is not going to read it the exact same way as you intended it, the question is how much different it will be.” (R4, 22).

Some respondents take it so far that these technologies are to a certain extent dehumanizing so that the dangers of a f2f replacement or at least a growing suppression in the future suggests itself. One Personnel Manager has a particular fear that is based on exclusive computer communication:

“R6: I don’t like that at all. It’s very easy to hide in that position and I think it can lead to that people get sick. You get very lonely and again you read everything but you never see people’s reactions and it’s so easy to write everything and sometimes it can be mean and it’s easy to get mean on your own chair at home. So yes a certain amount of danger and fear.” (R6, 28).

Communication beyond face-to-face implicates fewer possibilities of adjustment and instant feedback and may therefore generate inefficient and unnecessary misunderstandings and confusion. In worst case this can become a never-ending story. Tough discussion are always better to have orally and f2f because with WebEx, phone- or video conferences it becomes very structured and targeted but for a tricky subject it is better to be relaxed. Video conferences additionally make a distant way of communicating and may include technical problems with the connection and sound. These disadvantages refer to all communication technologies in general. In a two-way communication and for negotiation purposes the respondents prefer the phone rather than E-mail. The communication nowadays generally tends to be more technical; the other channels essentially fasten the work flow. But this advantage also implies a negative aspect because at the same time they enhance the stress level.

“R3: It is a good way of communication because it goes faster but the development goes too fast and makes people so stressed and busy. Today we have to get things done faster [...].” (R3, 24).

It seems that these technologies are boon and bane at the same time. While Smartphones create a working space for 24 hours, E-mails today are defined as the biggest microstress factor of all:

“R5: [...] today we are more or less prisoners in an email world, it’s a trap actually. [...]We should stop this email hysteria; it would help companies to get much more effective.” (R5, 20).

The respondents have observed that especially younger people prefer to communicate via E-mail and are afraid to talk f2f. This is again linked to generational matters. Opinions and

experiences confirm that without E-mails people would talk much more f2f to each other and this would be a healthy exercise (example E-mail free Fridays in many companies). In a f2f conversation it is much easier to transfer emotions than in written language. This of course does not apply for poets as they have the capacity of writing texts that carry emotional messages:

“R1: [...] if the whole company would be poets then the real language would be quite interesting I would say but this is not the fact of course.” (R1, 58).

Based on experiences some respondents have developed a preference for travelling and f2f communication as they otherwise would miss a lot of informal information and decision making when their colleagues in another city have those discussions during the break of a video conference. But unfortunately the more time pressure people have the less time they spend to connect on a personal level. The tendency to temporally constrict f2f talks and make it quick in order to reach the professional could increase the effect of a negative spiral so that finally people do not meet f2f anymore. There are many cultural perspectives that may have a negative influence on the use of communication technologies. Cultural differences in expression, tone of voice, views on hierarchy and language skills increase the risk for misinterpretations and become a disadvantage on the phone, f. e. when talking to somebody that is not a native English speaker:

“R2: [...] they have a slightly different dialect in English and if you just speak on the phone, it’s difficult to hear and you have to repeat and may destroy the relation if you ask too many times. Then it might be helpful if you also see the body language and the face to read the lips. Otherwise you have to rely on written communication, but that will take longer but you will have a much clearer communication.” (R2, 48).

Another disadvantage of the phone are interfering sounds and noise sources in the surrounding. It can also be hard to reach colleagues on their mobiles when they are out of their offices. If the respondents collaborate in virtual teamwork they claim that it is much harder to communicate without having had an initial f2f meeting. The level of contribution may suffer as well. According to the respondents there is the danger of losing values and respect over mediated communication:

“R4: [...] it also has to do with respect. If you have a tough message for example there are dangers for somebody of cutting a job then you will never send a mail on a Friday afternoon. It should be done face-to-face and during a weekday when you actually meet the person again.” (R4, 22).

Having all the colleagues nearby in one building can become a disadvantage as everybody thinks they will meet each other f2f anyway and thus uses other channels but eventually they do not meet at all. Eventually there is an optimistic view on all these issues. The respondents believe that being humans we will always have the desire to meet f2f. Based on the work as an HR Manager talking, learning and educating will always make up a tremendous part.

7.6 Second Choice

In this context it is important to see how a f2f situation with a requested person can as well be solved in another way and to what extent f2f may be replaceable. The respondents explain for which way they would decide for and why. In general the choice is depending on the urgency of the matter and the purpose of the f2f contact. Global companies also have the problem to call at an inconvenient time especially when having colleagues in different time zones.

Many choose the phone for comfort reasons, interaction purposes and to get a quicker answer. Whenever they need to talk they can send an SMS over the phone and ask for a callback. Phone is also the second choice in order to avoid travelling again, to deal with negative subjects and to have a better possibility of changing the course during a conversation. Another option is chat for instant replies and the characteristic that somebody always gets back to you regardless the context of this person. Chat is furthermore viewed as the most efficient channels besides f2f to talk to people and ways more efficient than sending E-mails back and forth. With those it usually takes longer to get an answer but the sender does not need to consider the circumstances of the receiver such as disturbing during sleeping times. Some also send E-mails for less urgent matters and combine it with a f2f contact request.

“R3: I think I would send an email saying that I was looking for you but you weren’t there but can you please come to my office when you are back.” (R3, 26).

Others consider E-mail for an emotionless, one-way communication such as marketing purposes, sending information to clients or business proposals. In some cases the video phone helps out when f2f is not available or would only be under hindered conditions but the opinions concerning this technology are different in accordance to the usage behavior of the respondents. They think that video phone is quite similar or rather close to f2f and thus could be a good substitute. On the contrary they would only choose it as a second choice when the technique is working properly and when people get more used to it because in many companies this way of communication is still dramatic so that some of them are still

afraid of that situation. Other options are WebEx or the traditional way of leaving a note at a colleague's desk.

7.7 The Interview Situation

The research interviews were conducted f2f and therefore serve as examples of a personal communication situation. For this reason it is interesting to see in which way the respondents picture these interviews in another setting and with what consequences for the outcome. Thereby they can complement their previously given statements. If the interviews were not held f2f they first would have had a lower motivation or even no interest at all in answering the questions:

"R1: [...] I wouldn't have had so much interest in writing the stuff down. It would be shorter and more like a test that I have to do." (R1, 52).

"R5: I wouldn't have agreed to make an email interview [...]." (R5, 24).

Otherwise more preparation was needed but it could have increased the ability to come up with deeper thoughts and more examples. An E-mail interview could be more structured, concrete and absolute but f2f offers more energy, ideas and openness. It enables a better understanding of the questions, an interpretation of reactions and the possibility of making adjustments right away. Some respondents mention a higher reluctance over the phone whereas others do not see big differences in the setting:

"R2: I think voice is important, so telephone would have been sufficient [...]." (R2, 42).

"R4: I have made interviews like this over the phone [...]." (R4, 26).

They do not see differences in the information being given either. Still f2f differs in many aspects such as in trust and the likelihood of sharing:

"R4: [...] but what you miss is that I can read on you if you really understand what I mean or if I make myself clear. [...] The difference in a face-to-face meeting is the opportunity to feel a little bit more of trust, now I see and meet you and consciously or unconsciously that affects how comfortable I feel in having this discussion and maybe effects how much I want to share. The likelihood of sharing more is bigger in face-to-face meetings." (R4, 26).

Having the interview f2f is viewed as self-evident as it suits the nature of their jobs and tasks working as a Personnel Manager. In addition to the sense of trust the respondents refer to the feeling of a higher contribution to this study:

“R6: Now I have you and your face and you have told me who you are and where you come from and even if you did that through email it’s not the same. And I feel that I contributed with something by meeting you.” (R6, 36).

The language could have had an impact as the interview was possible to conduct in Swedish over the phone, but not in English. Whereas Social Media could be more flexible the highest amount of interaction still lies in f2f. Further they believe that is much more convenient to meet f2f instead of getting into the mood of writing everything down. In summary most of them are more convinced of the f2f interview and of the fact that there would have been a difference in its quality. Concerning other ways of conduction and the setting the opinions are somewhat different.

8 ANALYSIS

In the following chapter the relevant theories and studies will be discussed in light of the data results. Hence the importance of face-to-face communication will become clear and coherent in a broader context.

8.1 The choice of communication: Advantages and influencing Factors

In her Human Resources Approach Miller explains that immediate feedback and a higher consideration of nonverbal cues are very distinct in face-to-face interactions (cf. p. 50). This is a statement which the respondents refer to very often and explicitly. They value the opportunity of adjusting a message and its interpretation according to the instant feedback of the receiver in a face-to-face interaction (cf. R4, 22). One reason why they choose f2f for certain issues is the advantage of observing nonverbal communication behavior. “It is about the nonverbal or not openly expressed things that I can perceive when I meet people.” (R1, 18). They prefer to read the face and see the body language during a conversation (cf. R2, 16/48; R6, 20/36; R8, 12).

Central for the idea of the Human Resources Approach and respective organizations is the strength to draw on people’s abilities and knowledge in the most efficient way in order to develop an organization’s productivity to the maximum. Working with people and getting

their motivation and knowledge is the absolute best way for a company to improve results and leadership (cf. R5, 6/14). For most respondents face-to-face is therefore the most effective way to assure this approach. This also conforms to Miller's theoretical view that "sometimes these resources can best be utilized through face-to-face contact in meetings." (p. 51). In other contexts an E-mail or paper material appears as the right option for communicating a certain issue. From this it follows that the choice of a channel is depending on the purpose, circumstances and the communication matter at hand. This is both defined by Miller and explicitly illustrated by the respondents (cf. R1, 24; R2, 36/40; R4, 16/24; R5, 22; R6, 20; R7, 8/14/18; R8, 18). It is especially those factors and the quality of a communication channel that influence the choice and a possible combination of several ways. These assumptions are adopted by Trevino, Lengel and Draft (1987) and illustrated in their Media Richness Theory in organizations.

The data results relate to the MR theory consentingly in many aspects. The respondents are well aware of the fact that equivocality is an interfering factor in all their communications: "You only know one thing when you send a message which is that the receiver is not going to read it the exact same way as you intended it, the question is how much different it will be." (R4, 22). Whether the selection of the appropriate media is made consciously or subconsciously differs between the respondents. Some deliberate their choice explicitly according to their purposes: "The ways of communication have its pros and cons depending on the context, topic, individual and the result you want to have and sometimes you need more channels than the words to get the full picture, so it's not one way being superior than the other, it's more about understanding when does what have the best impact and when to use combinations." (R4, 16), "It really depends on the question." (R6, 20), "Of course I evaluate if it's necessary to meet, maybe we can take it over the phone or email, it depends. I don't meet people just to meet them. I meet them because it's necessary or we have a question or something important to talk about [...]." (R6, 24), "Sometimes I challenge if it makes sense for me to travel to Stockholm because it takes some hours to get there and back home but if I really need to be there in person then I go." (R7, 18), "It's a matter of time management and efficiency that you need to balance how efficient is this way of doing the communication, how important is it and how much time do I have available." (R2, 24). Others explain different situations for choosing respective media and thus demonstrate the subconscious selection process and the fact that they do distinguish between media regarding the purpose of the message and the property of the channel (cf. R1, 24/40; R2, 34; R3, 10/22; R4, 8).

Another aspect is that all of them decide for the richer face-to-face way in case of unclear situations and difficult topics and therefore support the assumptions of the Media Richness Theory in organizations (cf. f. e. R6, 10). Among them face-to-face is ranked first as well to reduce ambiguity and to avoid misunderstandings in the first place: "Difficult meetings we need to take f2f because you want to see the entire reaction which you can't on the phone." (R7, 8), "Usually it's a good way to defuse if there are any conflicts or challenges [...]." (R2, 26), "Anything that can be a tricky situation or difficult to communicate and so on I prefer to

take that face-to-face.” (R7, 14), “If I have a matter that is of a sensitive nature then I need to be able to read the face of the one communicating to, to see how this one will react because then I can adjust my way of communication much easier of cause. But I would say that if I have a sensitive matter then I would take an active turn to make it face-to-face.” (R2, 16), “And when I see that it is something difficult I ask them to come to my office and we can talk [...]” (R3, 16), “[...] the more uncomfortable a meeting the more I prefer f2f. If I have a really tough message to come with the last way would be to send it and have a communication over email because in a mail there is very little possibility to transfer tone of voice or feelings and it actually can be completely interpreted in a wrong way. Phone is a little bit better, not much.” (R4, 8), “A most common disadvantage is using mail for discussions about things you don’t agree on because in worst case it can become a never ending story whereas you could have avoid a misunderstanding at an earlier stage. I try to avoid these kinds of discussions on email. As soon as I see a mail from me can trigger these discussions I put it aside and call this person or go there if it’s someone nearby.” (R4, 22).

Consensus also becomes apparent regarding the use of “lean” communication channels for less complex and challenging matters and regarding the channel ranking: “If it was negative I would prefer the telephone because it gives a little better possibility to change the course during the conversation, even though I would hate to do it, but if there is no f2f choice. If it was a business proposal without strong emotions I would use an email.” (R5, 22), “It depends, if it’s a client that only wants information from us or a marketing purpose, one-way communication, I can send an email, but if you need to have some interaction with the other part it’s always the phone in that case.” (R8, 26), “Email you use especially if you want to send around information and you want to have reactions to it and kind of brief discussions on professional matters.” (R2, 22), “Chat is good because you can have an instant reply and even though they sit in another context they might have time to get back to you. Mail usually takes a bit longer to get the answers and the good thing with mail is that if you work in a global context, people might be sleeping, then you have the possibility to reach out to them. It is always a problem to call someone at an inconvenient time [...]” (R2, 38). In accord with the ranking phone is usually preferred prior to E-mail: “When I see that we can’t understand each other then I call because sometimes you can’t explain everything in the email, especially when it’s complicated matters or I feel that it can be misunderstood.” (R3, 14). Especially clear and precise issues are conducted through “leaner” media: “Giving orders to the staff, answering questions coming via email, remind the staff of something, asking for information from them, inviting them for meetings. [...] so a lot of collecting information from colleagues and send them out.” (R3, 12).

As well as the Media Richness Theory argues the respondents have realized that communicating face-to-face in certain situations makes them become a more competitive and effective organization: “I believe that a group that I have interacted with sees the goals and why we’re doing it and it creates much more enthusiasm and motivation so it’s a complete different situation if you talk f2f to somebody when it comes to getting a much more competitive organization working towards the same goals etc. [...] So again it is such a

big difference and so important for the next generation of leadership and management, also in terms of hierarchy and communication flow.” (R5, 14), “Face-to-face is a key factor for good management and to make a good company even better.” (R5, 24), “It’s a people’s business. It’s a numbers game, the more people you meet the better the hit rate and the success will be, both on the candidate side and client side.” (R8, 24), “[...] to meet [people] f2f is really important and also regarding being successful in the delivery of candidates you need to know how the recruiting manager or client buying our service is as a person and to know that you need to meet them face-to-face. It’s almost impossible to do it in a high quality way without f2f.” (R8, 12), “However there are certain ways of getting things done that absolutely require meeting f2f in order to be efficient.” (R4, 6), “But in general most issues coming at my table are best solved by sitting down with the persons involved and sort it out as the most efficient way, so that fits with my preference in f2f.” (R4, 14), “As a leader you want to reach your goals and be as effective as possible and like to create an efficient organization and I believe the best way of doing that is to work with people’s motivation and get them really involved from the fact that they know why they are doing it and get the possibility to discuss it and feel that they are a part of the discussion, [...] you lift the whole organization and create a higher effectiveness and motivation within it. For me it’s a really good business to communicate f2f.” (R5, 12), “[...] you get a better understanding which I think drives efficiency in communication and you get more efficient in targeting your message. Normally the best way of doing business is to at least meet a person f2f first, that’s how you build confidence.” (R7, 16). Eventually motivation is a key factor that derives from face-to-face encounters between HR Managers and their employees or clients. Correspondingly Hargie (1997) acknowledges the importance of motivation for determining and realizing goals in social interactions. These goals and people’s motivation to pursue them play a vital role in determining and influencing behavior. (cf. p. 34/35).

During the interviews the respondents explain certain aspects that affect their choice of media and can be leaned against the Social Influence Theory by Fulk and DeSanctis (1999). Such aspects are the complexity of a matter, time management issues, global or regional distribution and the aim of a conversation. Most of the times they refer to personal preferences or situational- and media-related conditions. They barely compare their statements to colleagues’ usage behavior or organizational norms. If still then they may even ignore their colleagues’ preferences consciously and work according to their own habits and comforts. This happens for example when others use to send many E-mails to each other; the respondents do not adapt this behavior if they prefer other practices. Being in higher positions one may wonder if the respondents themselves create norms or guidelines for the choice of communication channels in their departments. This idea did not become obvious in the end. However they mentioned a principle that applies to everybody in the company: people should as far as possible use the same channel as they did with a person in a previous contact. Despite all freedom of choice there are some constraints that avert the usage of certain media such as video phone technologies. In some organizations the facilities do not allow for conducting regular video conferences at the workplace; only in very important

cases. The respondents explain this behavior with the fact that some people are still afraid of this channel and it is not a common way of communicating there. This is an example of a negative confirmation of the theory. In the end it still remains a matter of conscious or unconscious influence and behavior.

8.2 Face-to-Face Communication at the workplace

In today's practice the face-to-face communication has to confront many technological tools that facilitate distance communication and improve speed and efficiency. However the personal contact captures a significant role within workplace communication and provides something that other channels lack of. In his article "How face-to-face communication helps at work" (2006) Sunder Ramachandran mirrors Managers' opinions and practices concerning several face-to-face situations and explains why this way is still valued so much (cf. Ramachandran 2006, 1B). One of the best ways to give feedback and show appreciation to colleagues is to talk to them in person. By that the degree of motivation raises as high as in no other channel. Congratulations or commendations over an E-mail are far away from having the same effect as it also has to do with respect. This completely underlines the attitude of the respondents. They emphasize repeatedly that they always prefer face-to-face in these cases and that they value the motivation that they receive in turn from their employees. Giving positive and negative feedback over an E-mail for instance can imply the risk of being misunderstood as the reader tends to focus only on the negative aspects of the mail. In a face-to-face encounter you can "put your point across, while being sensitive and diplomatic at the same time." (Ramachandran 2006, 1B). The results show that giving orders and tasks to staff members and thus assigning new responsibility is done by E-mail in many cases unless the task is of a certain importance and requires a special introduction to it. The nonverbal communication in face-to-face increases the understanding of a tasks and is usually the most impactful way, not least concerning time. The absolute best way of resolving conflicts with employees or clients is to meet and discuss them face-to-face. According to Ramachandran any other way only worsens the situation for this obvious reason: "It's important to remember that 55 per cent of meaning in an interaction comes from facial and body language and 38 per cent comes from vocal inflection. Only seven per cent of an interaction's meaning is derived from the words themselves." (ibid.). With this attitude Ramachandran completely meets the perceptions and practical performance of the respondents. The last way they would choose to solve a conflict would be written communication such as electronic mail or chat etc. Judging from their experiences any other way than face-to-face triggers unnecessary misunderstandings and results in long discussions back and forth without reaching a common sense in the end. In order to create and maintain trustworthy relationships certain situations, especially conflicts, should only be handled by means of a personal communication.

The authors of Media Orchard add another feature of face-to-face communication at the workplace which is empathy. “Before conference calls, before e-mail, before press releases, before internal memos, before Skype, before Twitter, before blogging, before VNRs — if face-to-face is possible, it’s nearly always the best option.” (Media Orchard 2009, 1H). What they pursue is the communication of unpopular news by the personal appearance of the responsible person. This behavior transmits the feeling that CEOs and other people in higher positions actually care about decisions being made and the effect that they have on employees. Simultaneously employees perceive a higher degree of closeness, care and empathy regarding their executives. Tools such as press releases and E-mails should only be used for the provision of information and not be the exclusive way of communicating in any direction. If face-to-face is being avoided to a large extent “employees will start to view its executives as the public views celebrities — with distance, detachment and, ultimately, ridicule.” (ibid.). The respondents agree that face-to-face communication should for no reason being tried to avoid and if possible be chosen at any time as it bridges distance and creates the best basis for a mutual understanding and appreciation. This is well labeled by the term empathy.

A statement that underlines the power of face-to-face communication is made by business coach and consultant Carol Kinsey Goman: People prefer to get information face-to-face (2008). Although employees welcome a leading person to guide their way they also want to hear important messages from their immediate directors and managers as it provides substance and clarity in a busy world. In special face-to-face meetings and discussions with their supervisors staff members as well as team leaders have the ultimate opportunity to ask questions, contribute with own opinions and exchange experiences. As also the respondents describe it the whole organization will profit from it finally. HR Managers that have recognized the value of this way of communicating with their staff have a significant advantage in terms of efficiency, satisfaction and success compared to other companies who believe that personal contacts inhibit effective work. This is reinforced by Coach Mike Krzyzewski as he values face-to-face as the best way to communicate among a group of business people in order to enhance teamwork and efficiency and eventually develop truth and trust (cf. Lodge 2010, 1J). While communicating face-to-face Managers should pay attention on the whole context. It is important to tell employees not only *what* they have to do but also *why*, *how* and *where* their tasks fit into the larger picture. According to the respondents this is the most effective way as it both improves the understanding and motivation on the staff’s side and in turn lifts up the whole moral and work atmosphere on the company’s side. An always highlighted benefit is the nonverbal expression and body language being only fully offered in face-to-face communication. This feature becomes most crucial in resolving conflicts, discussing difficult topics or negotiating important issues.

In her article “Face-to-Face Communication – Old Fashioned? Not!” Mary Jane Paris, Founder and President of Positive Impact Consulting Services, highlights occasions that may seem trivial at the first sight but support the need for human togetherness and establish connection on a quite effortless level. (cf. Ezine Articles 2008, 1K). One of them is the face-

to-face interaction over a cup of coffee, either at the workplace near the coffee machine or chatting in a café during lunch break. Those are fairly simple but often underestimated situations where no technology can compensate for these important people-to-people connections as a balance at the workplace. Most of the respondents experience this at their daily work and stated that they really enjoy these chats giving them the opportunity to clear their heads and change perspectives according to their colleagues' views on certain topics. It can give them new ideas and inspiration and eventually increase their efficiency later on. In agreement with the respondents Paris also argues that time is a paradox. People use communication technologies to send out quick messages and fasten their communication but simultaneously they need to take more time for personal connections instead of connecting through a phone call or sending a brief E-mail on a hectic pace. So in other words: people need to find the right balance and adjust their communication choice according to the situation and purpose at hand. Both Paris and the respondents view conflict, cost-efficiency, feelings, priority and location as crucial factors for determining the communication way. But in contrast to some of the respondents she believes that video conferences are not a good substitute for the face-to-face communication. Instead she offers one advice that, according to the results, all respondents would put their signatures below: "The next time you are tempted to send an e-mail, text message or make a phone call for other than routine purposes, stop! Get back to basics. Go out of your comfort zone and, instead, send the e-mail, text message or make the call to set up a face-to-face, in person meeting with the person behind the technology! Why? Because it works!" (ibid.).

Since mediated communication such as E-Mail lacks of a personal touch and emotional expressions Nick Morgan demonstrates that it is not surprising that people have developed emoticons for adding a certain understanding and transmission of emotions to an electronic message. These little pictographs comprising combinations of letters and punctuations, f. e. :-), :o, are an indication for people's deep reliance on emotions in their daily exchanges with one another (cf. 2004).

"Face-to-Face communication remains the most powerful human interaction", also Kathleen Begley, author of *Face-to-Face Communication, Making Human Connections in a Technology-Driven World*(2004) agrees on that. "As wonderful as electronic devices are, they can never fully replace the intimacy and immediacy of people conversing in the same room and it has worked for millions of years." Each of the respondents can practically assent to this statement to a high extent. A good communicator has to know the art of connecting with people on a personal level.

8.3 Face-to-Face and other ways of Communication

At first it is important to clarify the multiple cues being available in face-to-face communication and to note that no other channel offers this scope. These cues are the

words, facial expressions, gestures, body language, tone of voice and presence (cf. people communicating 2010, 1L). Any other channel only offers one or several of these cues but the communication will be most effective when all cues are present at the same time. In video conferencing the shared presence in a certain surrounding is missing so that additional information is not given to complete the whole picture. The respondents say that because of that people usually do not have the possibility of small talk and fail to connect on a personal level before the actual business conversation starts. Since this establishing of trust and confidence is mostly missing in video conferences the respondents prefer to travel and meet face-to-face especially for situations where priority and ambiguity of the purpose are high. Phone conversations lack nonverbal features like facial expression and body language so that the word and tone become even stronger. Herein lays a slight danger. If people do not fully pay attention on their spoken words and tone of voice while having a phone conversation the message and intention can very easily be misunderstood by the receiver. Therefore the respondents recommend to avoid having tough discussions over the phone and rather meet the person and sit down for an in-person talk. Even lower is the variety of cues in texting via SMS or PDA etc. The written word is the only possibility to express ideas in texting. The results show that the respondents use this way of communication only for sending out brief comments or information to colleagues where emotion and conflict issues do not matter. The main idea is to get this information off to people without thinking about disturbing them at the time. They barely use texting for a two-way communication as it does not provide a good basis for a discussion. E-mail is similar in the scope but implies a certain delay in the communication circle. Hence an E-mail can also be send when the purpose is not as urgent as for instance in texting and people do not necessarily expect to receive an immediate answer. The E-mail behavior of the respondents is characterized by a high frequency and traffic level and a two-way communication in many cases. However they claim that the higher the priority, complexity and delicacy of a topic the more likely they will choose face-to-face instead of E-mail. The risk of being misinterpreted is simply too high in this channel. Even though people try to compensate the missing cues of face-to-face communication in other channels by sending emoticons, using word formatting or creating avatars all that cannot replace a face-to-face communication as being the most complete and clear way of getting messages across (cf. people communicating 2010, 1L).

In some companies today Social Media and Networking tools constitute one form of collaboration between employees. The supporters of this communication structure assert that the power of innovation and collaboration is improved and this will lead to higher work productivity (cf. work interactive 2010, 1M). The respondents add that also the level of trust and identity building benefits from Social Media and its implementation in HR Departments. Nevertheless these technologies require a tremendous amount of resources, both timely and monetary in terms of responsible people and many organizations need to start by reconfiguring their communication to adapt a more modern behavior.

Brad Hunter positions other types of communication as being only supplemental to real world interactions even though they can provide intimate relationships and support (cf.

2011, 1N). This especially applies to Social Networks and Online Communities. Since it can be hard sometimes to maintain relationships over long distances those technologies enable people not to replace those connections but to strengthen them, even only in a virtual way. However they should never exclude the participation in real communities. There also is a certain danger deriving from the use of the telephone. People may assume that they can handle specific issues by simple phone calls being as good as face-to-face encounters. In the end the physical contact additionally provides biological benefits and without it people can become depressed and get sick. This fear is also uttered by some of the respondents. They do not see other channels replacing the face-to-face in the near future. Hunter summarizes by saying that “in this world of the Internet, e-mail, instant messaging, cell phones, pagers, faxes, and the World Wide Web, we should keep in mind the importance of face-to-face communication. While we maximize the abilities and benefits of these new communication technologies, we need to remember to engage in local communities and physical interaction for the subtle and important benefits which they provide.” (ibid.)

There is an interesting study from 2002 discussed by Guy Kawasaki about the persuasiveness of face-to-face compared to E-mail which draws a distinction between men and women (cf. Guadagno, R. E.; Cialdini, R. B. 2002). Researchers have found out that men are more susceptible to E-mail as it lowers their competitive tendencies whereas women reach a more effective communication in face-to-face encounters because they are more relationship-oriented. Another result is the level of “oneness” with a person i.e. the extent to which somebody identifies with another person. “When the oneness was low between men, email was much more effective. When the oneness was high for women, face-to-face interactions were much better.” (ibid). It is difficult to recognize significant differences between the statements of the female and male respondents as their answers and attitudes did not disclose obvious tendencies towards the confirmation of this study. The preferences and usage behavior of certain channels basically coincide in any fundamental aspects. It may be that this argument requires a deeper psychological examination and analysis in a further study.

9 CONCLUSION

The research topic has been analyzed according to the research question: Which role does the face-to-face communication play in the work of Human Resources Managers? The analysis and data results demonstrate that the HR Managers take advantage of the substantial spectrum of possibilities and use many different ways of communication at their workplaces. Usually these interactions are characterized by *combinations of channels*. Significant is the fact that *they precisely question which channel they use for what purpose* and this naturally happens on conscious before any communication. Thereby the *choice is depending on the sender’s intention and the receiver’s circumstances if possible, the matter at hand, the complexity of a topic, the features of a channel and most crucial time aspects.*

These are some very important and representative findings of this research study. In their statements the HR Managers mostly agree in regard of their communication behavior patterns. However there appears a main difference concerning the specific choice of a communication channel and this refers to *video conferencing and Social Media*. The reasons for this are based on several conditions. Decisive are the *office arrangement, the size and structure of the company building and the number of employees*. Other important influencing factors are the *logistic alignment, geographical aspects such as operating on a local, regional or global basis* and also *generational differences and preferences*.

The HR Managers are of the opinion that people generally need to improve their interpersonal skills and connect this to the *significance of communicating face-to-face*. The results refer to the research question in particular as all respondents are convinced that face-to-face communication will always be extremely important and that it cannot be replaced adequately by another channel. Moreover *face-to-face is essential for successful companies and a long-term business*. Since this personal way has its drawbacks as well and is not always the ultimate way to communicate it is important for every HR Manager to *find the right balance and to always know when to use which channel for what purpose and situation*. Technologies are great enablers in today's work place communication but at the same time a face-to-face communication is becoming more important than ever in the context of impersonalized communication. "You can't beat face-to-face communication" concludes a British survey done by specialist journal IRS Employment Review in 2005 (cf. management-issues 1A). And Alan R. Winger acknowledges the importance of face-to-face communication and its effectiveness of information transmission in situations where sender and receiver are in the same room (cf. Winger 2005).

The study shows clearly that the interview method was more than appropriate to conduct this research. The respondents might otherwise not be willing to give information or only very short answers. They believe that *misunderstandings* could have interfered and *less information* was disclosed because of *lacking trust and a foreignness feeling* in any other channel than face-to-face. The *reading of nonverbal signs* enabled a broader discussion with more questions and a *deeper understanding* on both the respondents' and interviewer's side.

Motivations for further research may explore the generation matter in a deeper way and study the extent of this specific influence. Qualitative interviews with employees can give insight into their patterns and help to compare their views with the statements made by HR Managers in this study. An additional observation of the communication behavior at the workplace using the shadowing technique as an example appears as a different approach and can be enriched by recordings of a workweek. Another focus may be directed on one or two specific influencing factors taken from this study in order to challenge the obvious tendencies and to extract the effects more clearly for a final confirmation or negation.

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APPENDIX

The Interview Compendium

Overview Interview Transcriptions

The Interview Compendium

Introduction

For how long have you been working as an HR Manager in general/ in your current position?

Tell me about your job and what you like most about it.

Ways of Communication

What are the available ways of communication in your department?

Possibly talk more about f2f

Could you describe different situations when you use f2f?

What are typical/ usual cases at your workplace for communicating via ... *other named channels*

Face-to-Face Situations

What do you value most in f2f communication?

What are your personal motives for choosing f2f communication over other available channels in your department?

Talk more about consequences in the given situations

Under what circumstances would you never prefer a f2f contact?

Mediated Communication

How do you think can other channels enhance a f2f communication (improve, complement)?

Can you imagine any disadvantages or even dangers of a mediated communication compared to f2f?

Creative Conclusion

If one person is not available for a f2f contact, which channel would you fall back on as a second choice (and why)?

In what way would this interview have been different if we did not choose f2f, what do you think?

Check-out

Is there something you would like to add?

You are welcome to email me if there are thoughts that you want to add after this interview!

Overview Interview Transcriptions

Interview	Day	Time
R1	01.03.2011	32min,59sec
R2	10.03.1011	24min,17sec
R3	14.03.2011	46min,03sec
R4	06.04.2011	69min,14sec
R5	06.04.2011	66min,04sec
R6	08.04.2011	32min,58sec
R7	11.04.2011	32min,57sec
R8	12.04.2011	22min,56sec

Fig. 3: overview of all transcribed interviews with day and time information (own illustration)